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DECORATION & FURNITURE

"THE VILLARD MANSION."

PERHAPS the most notable thing about the house in Madison Avenue, lately the residence of Mr. Henry Villard, is the singleness of the impression made by the beauty and magnificence of its interior decoration. Any one who has gone through many of the houses which mark the new era in the splendor and luxury of domestic life in this country will understand how this distinguishes the Villard house. Most houses are chronological and geographical. We make the tour of the ages in passing from room to room. This is Egyptian, that Mauresque; now we are in Italy, and now with Queen Anne; across another threshold and our feet are in Japan. This by no means signifies that periods or climes are strictly considered. There is large eclecticism, and much clever adaptation to the wants and necessities of the new world. But our minds are nimble and imaginative, and these details count for more with those who dwell among the Louis Seize elegancies and chinoiserie, while the casual visitor takes in the predominant characteristics. When one emerges from one of these luxurious and (so to speak) polyglot dwellings, it is with confusion of mind and Babelish ringing in the ears.

The Villard house is conceived from a radically different standpoint. The group of buildings of which it forms one wing is copied from an Italian palace. There are, in fact, six houses, four of which are entered by the court-yard, which is inclosed on three sides, the fourth opening upon Madison Avenue. This subdivision by no means interferes with the structural unity of the general plan which, in this moment of architectural unrest, is so simple in line and proportion and so little dependent on ornament that in the popular mind it has almost no individual significance.

The Villard house occupies the entire right wing. The vestibule is entered, as has been said, by the court. On the threshold one gets the key of the interior—that which is the distinctive mark of each room—for the house within as without is strictly Italian. This is color; but the qualification must be conceived in a poetized, sublimated sense to convey an idea of the manner in which it plays so important a part in the decoration. It is the soft radiance which fills the vestibule that claims the attention, not the magnificence of the mosaics and the panellings of Sienna marbles that produce it. In the hall the same impression is strengthened. One walks, it might be said, in veiled sunshine. Above, beneath, no other color disturbs the tone resulting from the pale, warm Sienna marbles and the deeper browns.

The hall runs at right angles with the vestibule, opening at one end into the drawing-room suite, and at the other into the music-room. The walls are panelled to the ceiling with slabs of Sienna marble separated by slender lines of deeper tinted marble, inclosing an inlay of the lighter Sienna. The shallow vaults of the ceiling are inlaid with a graceful Renaissance design. The great fireplace is surrounded with a mantel of Sienna marble, a replica of an old Italian piece, in which female heads as medallions make the ornament. Above this is a beautiful figure in relief by Mr. St. Gaudens. The corresponding ornament on the opposite side is a coat of arms with its legend carved also in the marble slab. In line with the vestibule the grand staircase opens into the main hall. Here all is marble leading up to the gold-panelled ceiling, a flood of warm creamy tints, which the stained glass windows of the landing, restrained to yellows and amber, can only enforce.

The details of all this work are exquisite, yet so subor-

dated that search is needful to discover them. About the entrance to the drawing-room, and the casings of the windows of the hall there is no wood. The Sienna marble is carried inward, giving a perspective, and the clear-cut simple beading of the lines of intersection is the only ornament. The elegance and simplicity of this treatment is as delightful as unusual. Linger around the balustrades, one discovers that each is unlike. There is a certain graceful waywardness in each band, and a different ornament wreathes each curve. The striking feature of the stairway, after the sense of its spacious magnificence, is the clock. Golden rays tipped with silver point to the hours, and make a medallion set in a square frame, cut into the marble, in which the signs of the zodiac are left in low relief. The idea and the workmanship are both worthy of comment, but the chief service of the clock in its ornamental capacity lies in the effectiveness of the gold and silver, focalizing, one might say, the radiance of the hall.

The transition to the drawing-room suite is easily effected by mingling red with the warm creams. The room is divided by mahogany pillars into three divisions, which happily differentiate spaciousness from emptiness. These pillars, like the panelled spaces above the mantels, and the divisions of the wall panels, are covered with fine Renaissance ornament in inlays of white mahogany and pearl. Mr. Villard's monogram is skilfully woven into the ornament, and as indissolubly part of the decoration as the N and imperial bee of the Tuileries, which no change of régime can efface, without utter destruction. The variety and spontaneity of the ornament, which is lavished on every hand, one does not easily exhaust. The wall hangings of *écru* silk wrought in the tints of the mahogany, or of mahogany wrought in *écru*, carry out the graceful effloriations, and the embroidered sofas and easy-chairs vary the same themes. The pertinent criticism is that, in the midst of this luxuriance, the eye seeks some resting spot, some plainer surface. This is partly found in the ceiling, in which the ornament in relief is more open, and is left in the unbroken warm cream tint. But the feeling is, that this want would be better satisfied if the wall hangings were left unornamented, or the furniture in the unbroken tints of red or cream. The color effect, the resultant of this intermingling of red and cream, is warm, joyous, and exhilarating. Such a room dispenses with other ornamentation. It is difficult to conceive how bric-à-brac and other impedimenta of drawing-rooms can be aught but an impertinence. This certainly would be true of anything, no matter how rare or artistic, which jarred against the color of the room, and also because the ornament which accompanies the construction, in its variety, refinement and beauty, deserves the attention which more obtrusive things might claim. The two mantels and their surroundings are cases in point. Slabs of Mexican onyx surround the fireplaces. Above are the slender mantels, the panels extending to the ceiling in a wealth of ornament, and expanding at the sides in carved niches. That such work is possible here contributes to a renewed feeling of national independence, as this, with that of the mosaics and more elaborate carving, I believe, has all been done in this country.

Opposite the grand staircase large oaken doors carved in rosettes open into the dining-room, which is panelled to the ceiling in old oak, and is subdivided by a screen of perforated carving into a small and a larger apartment. This ornaments without concealing the noble proportions of the room, which would be sombre were it not for the mantels of Verona marble placed at each end, the deeper red of whose tones mingles well with the richness of the oak. These mantels, as that of the hall, are copied from old Italian pieces. On one the ornament of the frieze is bulls at play, cut in low relief. The other mantel, however, with its accessories, is the feature of the room. The marble is carried to the ceiling and three figures, signifying "Joy," "Hospitality," and "Moderation," modelled by Mr. St. Gaudens, are carved in high relief. The disposition of the figures is peculiar. They are apparently seated, their arms clasping their knees, and the limbs thus brought together, make the

figures in effect bold medallions cut in the marble. On each side, the panelling extends to the intersecting walls, and below are niches in which figures of dolphins are seen, with tails upward and rippling water coming through their open mouths. It is difficult in describing such work to prevent the magnificence of the materials from having undue prominence. This entire end of the room is covered with marble, but it is its disposition, its color, and the unusual features of its ornamentation which give it its chief value. The ceiling is crossed by heavy oak beams, and between these is a light Renaissance scroll-work in relief, with small medallions filled with mythological figures painted by Francis H. Lathrop. In the general effect these mingle with the prevailing soft, iridescent tones of the ceiling decoration, but are worth much more exclusive attention. The frieze is of oak, panelled in sections, each of which holds some hospitable and genial sentence in German, while a gustatory Latin apothegm adorns the border. The double doors which lead into the hall and music-room complete the rich color effect. These doors are otherwise novel and artistic, two terms which are not often allies. They are covered with ornament in the prevailing style of that throughout the house, brought out by means of small copper nails, varying in size and burnished in different degrees. These produce a sheen over the surface, flashing and changing as they catch the light. The effect is beautiful, and incomprehensible until it is analyzed.

The music-room which completes the suite of the first floor is a lofty, vaulted apartment in white and gold, with windows looking eastward in which light-toned stained glass, sparing in color, is set. The room is not yet completed, the vault and the spaces above the wainscoting being still untouched. The wainscoting is in soft pine, carved in ornament symbolic of sweet sounds, and is to be brought out in white and gold.

There is a temptation to linger over the details of the house, over the beadings and the chaste mouldings, which, to the last story, so carefully reproduce the spirit of a prolific, yet wholesome, well-balanced age. The halls throughout, with their generous fireplaces, give the house a homelike air, and each stairway tempts description. On the second floor there are three noteworthy rooms. The library, in mahogany, is in keeping with the calm, restful style of the house, but makes otherwise no pretensions. Its ample cases, however, reproduce on the lower panels in inlays of white mahogany, an interesting series of the trademarks of the famous old bookmakers. Directly opposite the library is the antique room with gloomy beams and nail-studded ceiling. Here the mantel, the canopied bed, the dresser and chairs are Italian, old, but otherwise of little interest to us. Connected with this is a small boudoir in white and gold. The canopied ceiling is set with gold ornament, and a light, graceful design in gold fills the panellings of the door. The doors, in fact, throughout the house, while claiming no attention, are each found, when the eye rests upon them, to contain something in panel or moulding that suggests the decorative feeling that pervades the place. This is true also of the mantels that, to the remoter rooms, are as thoughtfully considered as the more magnificent works of the lower floor.

The same regard for color distinguishes all the chambers. In these, soft neutral tints prevail which are carried through the carpets, draperies and over the chintz-hung walls.

There are several features of the house that still deserve mentioning. One of these is a private stairway with access to the vestibule without going through the main hall. This has panels of light wood, the designs of which, and of the balustrades, are among the attractive pieces of detail in the house. This stairway winds to the upper floors and from the lower steps the eye pierces to the gilded, inlaid dome and its brilliant lantern. Side by side with this stairway is the little elevator inclosed in perforated carved screens, earning its right of way as a decorative feature as well as a most faithful servant.

MARY GAY HUMPHREYS.

[SUCH a palace as here described would probably, in any country in Europe, be the home for centuries of

some patrician family. It is a sad commentary on the mutability of commercial prosperity in the United States that, through business reverses, "the Villard Mansion"—as every one still calls it—ceased to be the property of Mr. Henry Villard, even before the decoration of it was completed, and it is now without an occupant.—ED.]

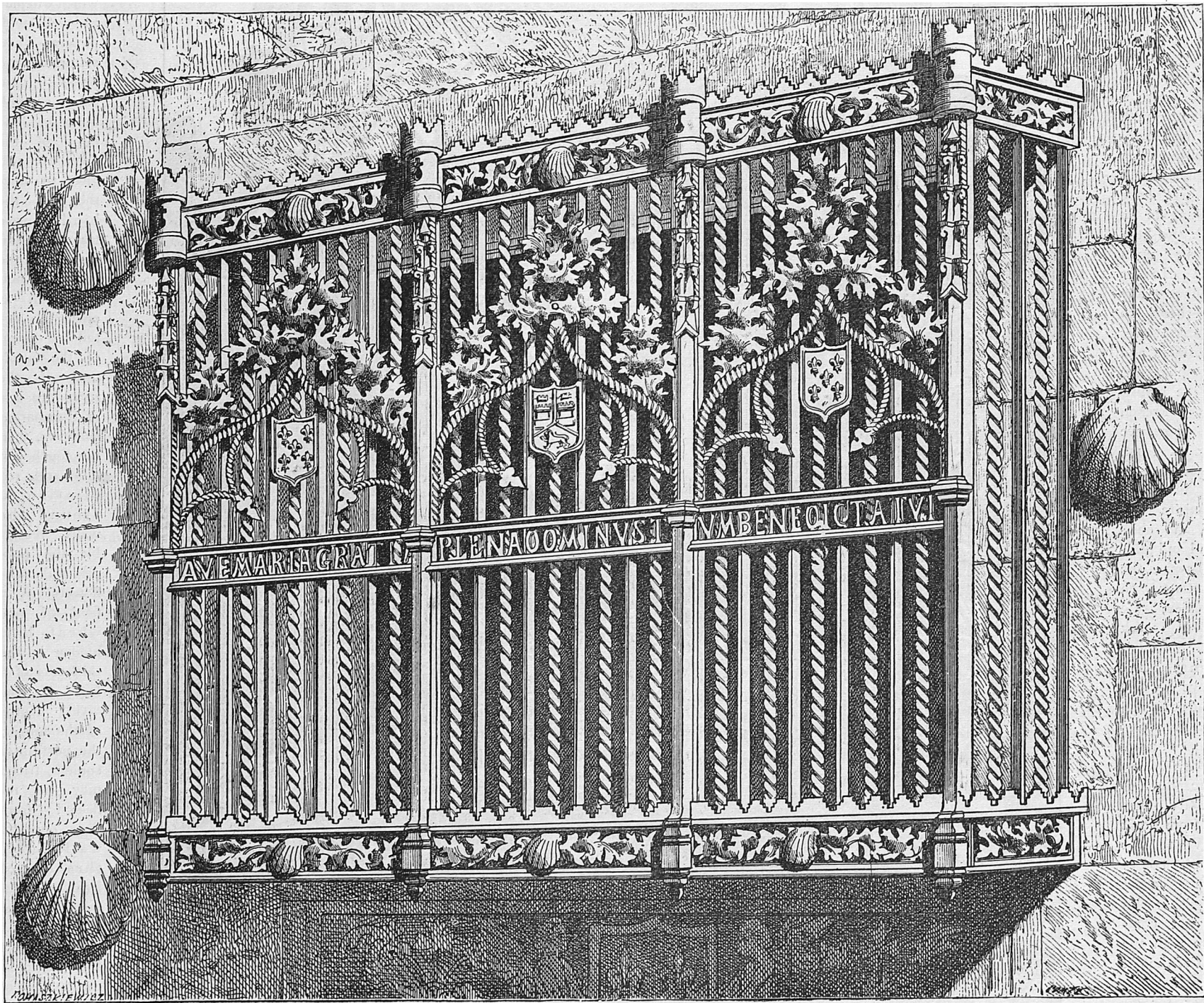
AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DECORATOR.

THE careful observer of decorative art work in London during the last few years cannot have failed to note the influence exerted by Robert Adam, the architect and decorator, who died in 1792. The pre-Raphaelites have held aloof from this revival, too disdainful even to sniff

then understood that, instead of going to Athens to study architectural remains, he went to Spalatro, in Dalmatia, to design from the ruins of the palace of Diocletian, a structure indicating alike the decline of civilization and the advance of barbarism. He returned from the continent about the year 1762, and shortly after published in a large volume, with descriptions and illustrations, the result of his studies at the Dalmatian palace. In consequence of this supposed valuable contribution to the science of architecture, he was appointed architect to the king, George III. This, of course, made him fashionable, and he set his mark of prettiness upon much of the architectural as well as purely decorative work of his time. The Adelphi in London was the work of himself and his brother James, and the name is much more classical

hangings, on dado, frieze and field. They are usually graceful urns, classic in conception but "Adam" in construction, delicately festooned with garlands; cameo-like medallions, such as Flaxman, not far from that time, put upon the "classic" Wedgwood ware; airy female figures swinging on wreaths and ending in forms resembling acanthus leaves; winged women ending as dragons, and dragons not ending at all, but perched upon terminal pillars, centaurs, rams' heads, lotus flowers opening into strange forms, and very well-conditioned and pleasant-looking Muses.

The two most distinguished architects of that day were Adam and Sir William Chambers. In Rickman's *Life of Telford*, the engineer, is recorded Telford's meeting with these two celebrated men. Sir William



SPANISH WINDOW-GRATING.

SIXTEENTH CENTURY IRONWORK IN THE "HOUSE OF THE SHELLS" AT SALAMANCA. (SEE PAGE 81.)

the sniff of contempt; but the profusion of "Adam designs" in recent decorative exhibitions of hangings, stuffs and furniture proves that taste is no longer willing to sit in dimness, even at William Morris's bidding.

It is quite true, however, that there might have been stronger men brought out from the past than Robert Adam. He was an exponent of the artistic delicacy of his time—imitated from the refinements of France—rather than of its strength. He studied the antique with fervor, but without largeness of comprehension, and his work shows a lively imagination and airy grace rather than robust sympathy with his majestic models. When he was twenty-five he went to Italy in search of classical knowledge, and remained there several years. He was particularly enamored of Greek art, but so little was it

than the design, "Adelphi" signifying "Brothers." Two of the streets running near the building were named by him, one "James," one "Robert." He became a thorough mannerist, and his style was always more "Adam" than classical. Nevertheless, there certainly is often much more purity of form in many of his decorative designs than in the wayward pseudo-classicism that we admire as Raphaelesque. Though he never saw Greece, he was too Grecian of taste to entwine his forms with unmeaning and grotesque arabesques; and there is always a distinctness of meaning in his designs that we sometimes fail to find in more elevated styles of architecture and decoration.

In the "Adam" renaissance of late years only the better designs are imitated on wall papers and satin

he described as haughty and reserved, while Mr. Adam was affable and communicative. He goes on to say: "The same difference distinguishes their works, Sir William's being stiff and formal, those of Mr. Adam playful and gay."

Adam also designed furniture, carriages, sedan chairs, plates, fireplaces, sideboards and even knife-boxes. Polished steel fire-grates came into use about this time, and are supposed to have been introduced by the brothers Adam, who also originated good metal work for door-handles and lock-plates. Their furniture designs were always of architectural character, like dolls' temples and palaces, and their chairs and tables were given to attenuation, even though the long, thin legs were Corinthian columns and classic monuments in miniature. Some of